Local students to be honored by state for STEM achievements

Two local high school students will be recognized by the state later this week for their outstanding achievements in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

Abigail Dagins of Eastside High School and Melissa Li of Buchholz High are Alachua County Public Schools' representatives to the Sunshine State Scholars program. The program recognizes high school juniors from across the state who demonstrate excellence in STEM-related activities.

Scholars will be gathering later this week in Orlando to meet state leaders, attend workshops, and network with representatives from Florida colleges, universities and STEM-related businesses.

Dagins is enrolled in the rigorous International Baccalaureate (IB) program at EHS. She's participated in school-based extracurricular activities, such as robotics, science fairs and the environmental club. She's also been active in community organizations, including the Humane Society of North Central Florida and the Girl Scouts.

In her qualifying essay for the program, Dagins discussed the award-winning research she's done on reducing waste and pollution by using mealworms and other organisms to recycle plastics at home. Her goal is to continue her work on protecting the environment in college and beyond.

"I want to be able to contribute unique and innovative solutions for the worldwide challenges of plastic waste and pollution," she said.

At Buchholz, Li has also been active in a wide variety of activities, including leadership positions with the math team, debate club, CoderGirls and Computer Oriented Mathematical Problem-Solving Club. She's won a number of awards in STEM-related competitions and has been teaching competitive math to younger students.

Li's essay focused on the importance of helping children find and develop a passion for a subject through engaging, hands-on activities.

"Pushing students out of their comfort zones through personalized challenges would ignite their competitive spirt and makes the learning experience fun," she said.

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